

Hartmut Walravens (ed.), *David Crockett Graham (1884-1961) as Zoological Collector and Anthropologist in China*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (Opera Sinologica Documenta; 1), 2006, 251 pp., incl. index, 6 maps.

### Mareile Flitsch

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– „Killed two birds. Light rain.“

In recent years, the issue of “missionary scientists” (Charles McKhann) in China and their contributions to scholarly knowledge, to museum collections as well as their role in political movements has attracted western scholarly attention. Furthermore, Chinese scholars have rediscovered the collections and publications of former missionaries in China and have started to republish and re-evaluate them. Indeed, in Chinese anthropology we observe the occasional transforming of western missionaries into forefathers of local ethnological heritage in China.

The American missionary, scholar of religious studies, China scholar, doctor, zoological collector and amateur taxidermist, excavator archaeologist, hunter and early ethnographer of China, David Crockett Graham was a key figure in the China collection history of the Smithsonian Institution as well as in West China border anthropology of the first half of the twentieth century. In the volume under review here, Hartmut Walravens has edited parts of Graham’s diaries (1924, 1927/1928, 1928, 1929, 1930) in a non-redacted version. In addition, the volume contains some of the letters Graham received from the US American ornithologist and palaeontologist Alexander Wetmore (1886-1978, from 1925 onwards assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution), and three travel reports by Graham on collection trips he carried out in Southwest China. With this publication Walravens brings to our attention a side of David Crockett Graham often overlooked when appreciating him as an anthropologist.

In this age of increasing digitisation of archives, one rarely lacks materials, but rather one is more in need of background information and contextual presentations of people and materials. Thus, when opening the book one would have hoped to find an introductory –perhaps guest

authored—article contextualising Graham's diaries in the history of the China missionary enterprise of his time. But this is not what these materials, published as the first volume of the Opera sinologica documenta series of the Harrassowitz publishing house, are meant to be about. With regard to Graham, it provides us with only a little more background information than the digitized "Finding Aids to Personal Papers and Special Collections in the Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 7148, David Crockett Graham Papers, 1923-1936" accessible online.<sup>1</sup> What deserves special mention and gratitude though is the detailed bibliography of Graham's publications (pp. 12-27, 178 entries) compiled by Walravens. This is spoiled somewhat by a slightly irritating slip-box style listing of publications on Graham on page 28 that entirely ignores research on him since the end of the twentieth century, as well as many other interesting issues such as, for example, the oral history materials on Graham in the Smithsonian Oral History Collection. Throughout the book Walravens' footnotes on a number of western as well as some Chinese scholars with whom Graham came into contact during his stay in China provide helpful supplementary information to the diary texts. At the end of the book an index as well as maps drawn by Graham himself can be found. The book thus provides us with all that is needed to arouse our curiosity about the anthropologist, missionary and scientist David Crockett Graham.

Graham's vita is remarkable: He was born in the last decades of the Qing empire, then was active in China as a missionary of the protestant American Baptist Foreign Mission Society from the first year of the Chinese Republic in 1911 on. In the historically complex times of the 1920s to 1930s, he undertook, as a kind of part-time collector, field trips for the Smithsonian Institution in the Sichuan-Tibetan and the Sichuan-Yunnan areas. Throughout his years as a collector between 1924 and 1932, Graham became increasingly professional in collecting specimens, collaborating with Han Chinese and "aborigine" hunters, collectors and skinners whom he paid with money from the Smithsonian Institute and ended up training himself. Graham was thus able to provide the US National Museum with numerous specimens (mammals, insects, birds, reptiles) and even discovered some new species, which were named after him. The butterfly *dryonastes grahami* is but one example. It is slightly irritating that the Smithsonian archive in the above mentioned online service gives the number of specimens collected by Graham as about 4,000, while Walravens mentions 400,000 (p. 8). Part of his activities consisted of taking an-

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<sup>1</sup> See URL: <http://siarchives.si.edu/findingaids/faru7148.htm#FARU7148i> (07.06.2010).

thropometric measurements of members of non Han ethnic groups he encountered. In his diaries one reads, for instance, "Measured two full-blooded Lolos and one half-breed." One wonders what has become of these materials. Graham also acquired a substantial number of ethnographic artefacts mainly from minority peoples like the Miao, Qiang and Lolo (Yi).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore the diaries testify to Graham's gradually becoming a photographer, serving as a technical history of the genesis of the remarkable collection of Graham's pictorial heritage.

Further anthropological data collection is only mentioned occasionally, even though his output of scholarly articles on the issue was remarkable. Lastly, Graham, in the service of the US National Museum, collected antiques sold on Chinese markets and archaeological artefacts he himself or Chinese collectors working for him excavated and collected from tombs and monuments. (Graham, by the way, was the first excavator of Sanxingdui 三星堆 jades in Sichuan). All this was shipped through postal services to the US. In 1932, he gradually abandoned his collecting and was transferred to Chengdu, where he taught archaeology and anthropology at the West China Union University. He became curator at the West China Union University Museum of Archaeology, Art, and Ethnology, a chapter in his life that is not touched on by this book, but of course remains highly interesting. Graham left China to return to the US in 1948, where he was honoured in many ways and taught about China until he passed away in 1961.

The great enterprise of documenting the nature and archaeology/anthropology of Southwest China and its western borders—including its populations with their physical and cultural particularities—is part of a globally entangled history into which "missionary scientists" as well as western and Japanese scholarly institutions, well-established western museums and emergent museums in China were all involved. Only recently have young academics, such as Andres Rodriguez and Jeff McClain, addressed this missionary enterprise with regard to its political impacts, and one can only look

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<sup>2</sup> Ethnographic artefacts collected by Graham were part of an exhibition at Whitman college Walla Walla, where Graham had pursued his studies at the end of nineteenth century, in 1997 under the title "South of the Clouds: Ethnic Groups of the Sino-Tibetan Frontier (Objects and Photographs from the Collections of David Crockett Graham and Charles Fremont McKhann)." The exhibition was curated by Charles Fremont McKhann and co-curated with David Deal; Maxey Museum, Whitman College. See <http://www.whitman.edu/anthropology/mckhann.html> (26.6.2010).

forward to their and hopefully more scholars' publications. Graham rightfully stands in the centre of their research.<sup>3</sup>

Written at the request of the Smithsonian Institution funding his collection activities, Graham's diaries are not the confessions of a missionary, but the result of his attempts to respond to their demands for accurate day to day reports on his work. Such diaries created "on demand" of course raise questions about what Graham—always worried about sufficient funding to carry out his work—wrote or neglected to mention to keep the funders happy. When reading through the diaries one returns again and again to this issue, and also to the fact that the missionary-self only emerges when he mentions Christians helping him in his work or sermons he has given. The diaries describe the chronologies of his collection activities, and include detailed geographical information, as well as information on the acquisition and preparation of specimens, including the personnel involved or the numbers of the shipping boxes. Throughout the period of the diaries, it is evident that Graham trained himself as a taxidermist and in the documentation of finds, accurately accounting for costs for Chinese collaborators, postage and nutrition fees, packaging or preservation materials. A frequent issue he notes is troubles with mailing boxes containing specimens. In addition, the diaries contain reports on the physical conditions of the collectors, on the availability or lack of medical care (to the extent of being a kind of running self-appraisal of his own health), comments on security issues (especially banditry) and collaboration with and support by local magistrates. Descriptions of political settings, personal observations and comments round up the list of topics, occasionally making the diaries exciting to read. They clearly show that his endeavours were anything but ordinary travel expeditions; they were hard, dangerous and tiring, with Graham constantly travelling by foot. Thus, we may retrieve a relatively complete picture of the circumstances of Graham's life and collection activities from the diaries, and thus of the concrete genesis of a collection.

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<sup>3</sup> See Andres Rodriguez, "Minguo shiqi de jianguo he renleixue: Sichuan xibu de chuanjiao renleixue shiye" (1922-1945)" (Nation-Building and Anthropology during the Republican Period: The Missionary Anthropological Enterprise in Western Sichuan (1922-1945)), in Temule (ed.), *Duoyuan zuqun yu Zhongxi wenhua jiaoliu* (Cultural Encounters between Multiethnic China and the West), Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2010, pp.105-33; Andres Rodriguez, "Building the Nation, Serving the Frontier: Mobilising and Reconstructing China's Borderlands during the War of Resistance (1937-1945)," *Modern Asian Studies*, Special Issue: China in World War II, 1937-1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy (forthcoming spring 2011); Jeff Kyong-McClain, "Barbarian Caves or Han Tombs? Republican-Era Archaeology and the Reassertion of Han Presence in Ancient Sichuan," *Twentieth-Century China*, 35.2 (2010): 4-24.

One of the persistent meta-narratives of Christian missions in the first half of twentieth century is that of benevolent men and women struggling in a highly complex and conflict-saturated Republican China for the sake of converts and against a rising communist movement that is persecuting them. Graham's diaries can be read as confirming this narrative. We read about the physical and mental hardship and worries of a China connoisseur, observer and religious man acting within a mission network to save souls, heritage and objects from a China that he sees as heading for its doom.

Through careful reading of the diaries, however, different stories emerge as well. We can detect a hardworking, self-disciplined man, who was simultaneously a missionary, hunter, taxidermist, photographer, informant on political events and Han-minority conflict relations, and scout looking for plants and animals that seemed to him suitable for the US market (p. 99 e.a.). While cooperating with and even working for the Republican government, in a way Graham also profited from the political turmoil of the time.

He was a contemporary of numerous other eager collector-scholars in Southwest China, amongst them the botanist, sinologist and Naxi researcher Joseph Franz Rock (1884-1962), about whose *oeuvre* Walravens also published a book in 2002.<sup>4</sup> Again, the question of why the interest in documenting China through collecting was so important seems to be a relevant research topic. Towards the end of his collection activities in the late 1920's, Graham competed with other collection institutions and collectors (pp. 104, 189, 205, 211). Meanwhile he had – to his own astonishment – been appointed a F. R. G. S. (Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society): "This seems strange in a way. All my collections have gone to our own National Museum, but this recognition came from the British Geographical Society." (p. 182). It becomes clear from the diaries that this was a time of change for a man who had become intimately acquainted with local anthropological, archaeological and many other affairs through travels into remote hunting grounds, through anthropometric measurements, and through observing religious ceremonies and inter-ethnic conflicts. He had, apparently, also by then mastered Chinese and Tibetan, if not also a local dialect. The next chapter of his life, his career as a China anthropologist and archaeologist, only partly shows up in this publication through three travel accounts from 1923, 1924 and 1929. The history of West China Border anthropology of the 1930s, West China Union University and especially the West China Union University Muse-

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<sup>4</sup> Hartmut Walravens, *Joseph Franz Rock (1884-1962): Berichte, Briefe und Dokumente des Botanikers, Sinologen und Nakhi-Forschers; mit einem Schriftenverzeichnis*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag (VOHD Supplement; 36), 2001.

um of Archaeology, Art, and Ethnology is only indirectly the topic of the publication under review here.

With regard to collection and museum history, Graham's diaries provide us with especially rich evidence on collaboration with local skinners and collectors, and conditions of technical and material constraints, such as the different levels of technical skills in skinning and preservation, the shortage of arsenic, the delayed arrival of post, misfortunes in hunting, and poor shooting as detrimental to preserving specimen hides. The history of collections, we read, depends not only on financing. This story is rarely taken into account and makes reading the diaries particularly interesting. One should like to read them against a contemporary technical history of taxidermy in China and the West to better understand the details reported by him. Sometimes the details are shocking. One example is how Graham and his fellow collectors and coolies by mere chance survived a meal. Due to a lack of salt, the cook had seasoned it with what he had taken for salt: arsenic (p. 105). Here as in many other instances Graham shows a very particular humour: "Well? I have long realized that a foreigner in China need not suffer from lack of a variety of interesting experiences."

Reading this edition of a part of Graham's diaries leaves the reader asking many questions, and hoping for the edition of a second volume of the diaries missing from this one.